LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® of MASSACHUSETTS
Membership and Local League Services Committee

Starting a Local League

League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
133 Portland St
Boston, MA 02114

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide. By joining the League, citizens can gain the information and skills they need to become effective participants in government. Belonging to an active local League offers additional opportunities to take part in the democratic process. For the organization as a whole, new members and new Leagues mean fresh ideas, innovative approaches to resolving public policy concerns, and ongoing sources of leadership.

The League of Women Voters is organized on three levels--national, state and local—with inter-League regional organizations (ILOs) in some metropolitan areas. Recognized local Leagues function in some 1,000 communities throughout the United States. In areas where there is not a local League, interested persons can join as Members-at Large (MAL). MALs automatically become members of the state and national League. A group of MALs may become a local League by first becoming an MAL Unit under the direction of a nearby local League or the state League office.

MAL Units offer members an opportunity to participate in selected League activities, serve the community and help train new leaders for the organization while operating under the direction of the state League.

MAL Units undertake community service projects that encourage citizen participation in government, such as candidate forums and informational meetings on public policy issues. They also are encouraged to participate in local issues, in LWV state and national program studies, and to respond to LWV action alerts.

Following is a brief guideline to becoming a local League. The first step is to organize an informational meeting to learn about formal League involvement. One or more representatives of the state League will be available to work with the group. The informational meeting can be handled in one of two ways: It can be a small gathering with the handful of people who have expressed an interest in forming a new League or it can be a community-wide meeting to which the public is invited.

The purpose of the **first meeting** is threefold: to introduce the League, to discuss the MAL process, and to plan an organizational meeting if interested in becoming a local League.

The purpose of the **second meeting** will be to generate wider community interest in the League, recruit additional members, select a leadership team, adopt a nonpartisanship policy and outline a calendar of activities. The date and time selected for the organizational meeting should be convenient for the widest audience possible. Choosing a site that is open to the public can help attract potential members from outside the group's immediate circle of friends and colleagues. Everyone present at the planning meeting should contribute to an extensive list of friends, neighbors, business associates and community leaders to receive personal invitations to the organizational meeting, and a plan to publicize the meeting should be developed.

The representative from the state League will play a key role at this point by helping the members identify and reach out to all segments of the community as they prepare to launch their new group. The organizational meeting sends an important signal about the League's

commitment to reflecting the concerns of all citizens. It gives the group an opportunity to share leadership and chart the League's future with diverse community members, enhancing the organization's ability to bring about positive change.

Before adjourning from the second meeting, everyone attending this informational meeting should be invited to join the League on the spot, if they have not already done so. At this point the local League can meet the minimum requirements for recognition by the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA).

LWVMA's Minimum Requirements for Recognition as a MAL Unit

- Five enrolled members
- A nonpartisanship policy
- The following leadership positions filled: President, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Chair
- Planned meetings or activities for the first few months.

Once the local League has met these requirements, it will have already completed the first six steps, out of fifteen, to forming a new League. Throughout the process the MAL Unit will have assistance from the LWVMA staff, and one or more representatives of the LWVMA Membership and Local League Services Committee and/or a nearby local League.

FIFTEEN STEPS TO FORMING A NEW LEAGUE

1. The idea for forming a new League arises, either through citizen inquiry or board initiative.
2. A nucleus of interested citizens is recruited.
3. A state advisor is appointed and confers (in person, by phone) with the interested group.
4. An informational meeting is held and the decision to proceed is made.
5. Preparations for an organizational meeting are made.
6. The organizational meeting is held and requirements for recognition are met (nonpartisanship policy; required number of paid members; leadership team selected).
7. The state League recognizes the MAL Unit.
8. Unit leaders plan a calendar of activities for the year and assign tasks for fulfilling the steps for recognition as a local League.
9. The Unit carries out a program of activities that furthers the League's mission, that is of interest to members and the community, and that demonstrates members' understanding of League policies and procedures.
10. Unit leaders develop and implement a plan for membership growth and diversity.
11. The Unit meets its financial obligations to the organization as a whole and demonstrates its ability to secure needed member and community support for its operations.
12. The Unit publishes a regular newsletter that keeps members and community informed about Unit activities, critical issues, and organizational achievement.
13. The Unit prepares for its annual meeting (budget, bylaws, program and nomination of a slate of officers and board of directors).
14. The annual meeting is held and final requirements for recognition are fulfilled (bylaws approved, budget and program adopted, officers and board elected).
15. The state League recommends to LWVUS that the Unit be recognized as a local League.

ROLE OF MENTOR(S)

- Consult with and advise Unit Leadership on all aspects of League activities
- Provide training on how LWVMA and LWVUS positions are developed and used
- Coordinate learning opportunities with surrounding local Leagues
- Facilitate program calendar development and implementation
- Work with Unit to develop budget
- Provide monthly progress report to the state office and membership chair
- Attend as many Unit activities as time permits
- Ensure records are kept properly and reports are submitted on time
- Attend first Annual Meeting
- Receive copies of all mailings and materials sent to new League

ROLE OF LWVMA

- Provide Leadership information (materials from LWVUS and LWVMA) to Unit leaders which includes the following:
  - Mission/Vision/Values
  - Voters Service Guides
  - Sample Non-Partisan Policies
  - Sample LWV Bylaws
  - Annual Meeting Script
  - LWVMA and LWVUS study information, position papers
  - Essential resources from lwv.org and lwvma.org
  - League Basics (lwv.org)
  - Registering for sponsored email lists
- Organize membership roster and send to Unit Coordinator/President
- Enroll new members in LWVMA and LWVUS
- Register mentor and Unit Coordinator/President for Presidents' Council blog and website
- Send all relevant information to mentor and Unit Coordinator/President: state program; newsletters; voters service documents; etc.
- Pay start-up expenses approved in budget
- Maintain copies of Unit activities and mentor reports
- Report Unit status to Board

ROLE OF UNIT COORDINATOR/PRESIDENT

- Represent Unit at local, state and national events
- Ensure members are registered for mailings, publications, etc.
- Set meeting agendas and preside over meetings
- Develop Unit policies and procedures
- Develop and maintain Unit budget (delegate to treasurer)
- Provide copies of activities and minutes to mentor and LWVMA state office (may be delegated to Unit secretary)
- Maintain up-to-date membership roster (can be delegated to Unit secretary)
- Work toward meeting goals of League best practices (lwv.org)
- Submit membership roster to LWVUS by yearly deadly (e.g. January 31)